Appendix E
The Complexity of Uses in Public Space Design: A Study of the Design of Successful Urban Public Spaces

By: Jeremy Person

> *"Landscape architects must be advocates of 'true publicness' in our public places."*
> – *Louise Mozingo* (Mozingo,1995, p. 42)

If one were to look at many of the historic public squares and piazzas of the world, he or she would notice a commonality among them. These spaces, used by different cultures with different values throughout their histories, share the quality that they are seemingly void of programmed design elements. They are typically large, open paved spaces thought to accommodate massive gatherings, such as markets or chariot races. The Piazza Del Campo in Sienna, Italy and the National Mall in Washington, DC are historic examples of such spaces. Each was designed to accommodate various civic functions while allowing easy public access. By design, these spaces adapt to different uses brought by different communities and cultures.

This is the quality that makes public space great. The world around us changes day by day, and great places must accommodate that change in their design. In a sense, they are able to morph; dynamically change in function in order to meet a community's needs. An urban square can serve as a market one day and as theatrical stage the next. A small turf area can be the site of a children's game in the morning and a shady lounging spot in the hot afternoon. A downtown plaza can become a forum for a grassroots environmental group, or a relaxing lunch spot for an office worker. Great civic spaces are able to mesh with the complexity of our ever-changing daily lives, allowing comfort and stability in a rapidly changing society. This is why the public loves and uses public space.

When public space becomes what philosopher Michael Walzer calls "single minded space", or public space that is designed with one objective in mind, it loses those qualities present in the great spaces of the world. Instead, people move quickly through these spaces and they serve little civic function, causing alienation between user groups and the community (Walzer, 1995).

Landscape architect Walter Hood points out in his book *Urban Diaries*, that "social injustices are created when certain uses are ignored or not provided for in the park, sometimes causing conflicts when unprogrammed uses occur" (Hood, 1997, p.8). True public space brings communities together on an informal level allowing people to interact and loiter freely, things that are sometimes overlooked in contemporary open space design.

Our charge as designers is to promote the design of public spaces that can serve the changing needs of a community. Over the life span of a built space, which can be hundreds of years, user groups will inevitably change. How can we design to adapt to changing interests? Walter Hood asks, "What strategies would better allow the voices of the community residents to be heard?" (Hood, 1997, p.8). Urban communities are screaming for public space that is open to their interests; many urban parks are degraded and vandalized causing communities to turn their backs on parks rather than taking ownership over them. As urban designers, we must take up this challenge and respond to the community's voices.

The modern city is thought to have emerged from the social changes brought by the industrial revolution, which changed the structure of human settlements. The revolution brought with it new technologies which spurred industry and generated the idea of mass production. The global economy boomed and thousands of workers were needed to keep the factories going. Wage labor spread and became the livelihood for families trying to survive. Philip Kasinitz writes that these actions formed the modern way of life. However, "the most overriding characteristic of modernity is its dynamism. The modern world is a world of change, change unprecedented in its speed, scope and the breadth of its social impact" (Kasinitz, 1995, p.1).

Cities change over time to address the needs of the resident populations. Storefronts change consistently based on the community, and the composition of a city council is meant to represent the diversity of interests present in each district. However, as cities have undergone dynamic changes, urban public spaces have not. Public space has not adequately met the changes of society. It is single-minded.

As noted earlier, Walzer distinguishes between single-minded public space and open-minded public space. Single-minded space is designed with one purpose in mind; shopping centers, highways, and financial districts, are single-minded spaces (Walzer, 1995). These types of space cause a sense of hurry, making people move through the space quickly, from point A to point B without stopping. Walzer points out that this can be seen at shopping malls, where a shop-

per moves expeditiously from store to store with the mindset of buying a particular item (Walzer, 1995). Conversely, open-minded space is designed for a variety of uses, possibly unforeseen, and is used by citizens who take part in different activities and are prepared to tolerate the activities of others (Walzer, 1995).

It would be easy to categorize much of what is perceived as 'public space' today as single-minded. For example, new commercial and retail developments are touted for creating a sense of urbanity, but in reality they act against the nature of cities by serving a single purpose. The user of this type of space is influenced only by the factors that brought the space into being. Shoppers at a mall are there only to shop and typically cannot be engaged by activities that the shop owners do not permit. Urban plazas in financial districts are there to serve the workers in the surrounding buildings. Anything that may not coincide with the interests of the businesses in the immediate area is prohibited. Political discourse, the spur behind great spaces such as the National Mall in Washington, DC, could not happen in many of today's spaces; or at least it has to be "permitted" by an authority, and subject to police scrutiny. Single-minded spaces create a sense that our actions are constrained; that we must behave a certain way in such a space. This excludes the informal, ad hoc activities that showcase the diverse culture in which we live. Single-minded spaces cut users off from the lifeblood of the city.

Single-minded space is not necessarily bad; it has a place within in the structure of cities. It can lead to a more private and intimate setting that people will relate to. It has been shown that teenagers value spaces where they can view the goings-on of the neighborhood without being seen. Prospect-refuge spaces create areas where people can quietly immerse in thought and excuse themselves from the life of the city (Owens, 1994).

As the demographics of neighborhoods and cities change, the public spaces that are so important to the urban structure must also change. Different user groups require different functions in their public space. Public spaces must respond to the complexity of uses presented by the communities in order to win support. Complexity of use refers to the myriad of activities that define the community. It is the varied functional use of the same design elements by different user groups over time. The activities are active and passive, formal and informal. The typical approach has been to respond to community needs on an individual basis, creating soccer and softball fields at one park and large gathering areas at another park on the other side of town. Playgrounds become tot lots separated from the rest of the park users sometimes by an actual fence. To respond to the complexity of uses presented by the community, design elements need to be adaptable—the community must be able to use the same elements for different purposes.

Designing public space for a complexity of uses creates a unique challenge for the urban design professional. Now the designer must think about how to incorporate change in his or her design. Typically, spaces are programmed with a use, or possibly a few uses. This doesn't allow for impromptu change because whatever happens must still fit into the predetermined guidelines for the space. Walter Hood relates this in a style he calls "Improvisation", or the "spontaneous change and rhythmic transposition of nonobjective components and traditional design elements within a spatial field created by a distinct framework" (Hood, 1997, p.6). Common daily practices, called "the Familiar" are given structure through traditional forms and design archetypes to reinforce the image of the community. Improvisational design seeks to hold spontaneous change as a cultural norm and promote individual expression. The image of the city is enhanced as the Familiar "validates the existence of multiple views of life in the city, even those that are outside of the normative view" (Hood, 1997). In this way, the design of public space elements or spatial relationships relates to the functional and social patterns that characterize a community's values over the course of time (Hood, 1997). By the use of improvisational design, Hood is able to relate the cultural open space needs of the community to the available sites, while allowing the specific function of the space to transform over time as the make up of the community changes.

Similarly, architectural writer Charles Jencks has characterized improvised design as en-formality. En-formality, Jencks writes, "is more than a style and approach to design, it is a basic attitude towards the world, of living with uncertainty, celebrating flux and capturing the possibilities latent within the banal" (Jencks, 1993, p.59). Improvisational, or hybridized design becomes a creative response to a social and cultural barrier; the rising tensions between dominant and minority cultures. This becomes a way to bring other voices into the mix, to allow for the unpredictable aspects of life to permeate through the design. It creates an architectural style that is not rooted in any one dominant culture or era, but rather influenced by diversity and respondent to all cultures. Jencks calls this style "Hetero-architecture." Regardless if it is called "mprovisational design," "en-formality and hetero-architecture," or "hybridized" design, it is "important for defining public space or, rather, redefining it in such a way that different people can enter into a fluid social situation" (Jencks, 1993, p.124).

It seems that the case being made for improvisational, or hybridized design is the case for more simplistic design in public spaces. This is not the case. The seemingly simplistic design of many historically successful spaces hides the com-

plex interweaving of cultures that makes up the structural framework of the space. In the Quang Trung housing development in Vinh, Vietnam, the modernist approach to multiunit housing design failed, giving way to informal "improvements" by the building residents. Here hybridized design came at the expense of poor housing design. In Lafayette Square in Oakland, California, Walter Hood proves that simplistic design elements in the right social context create park spaces that will be used by the community.

In the late 1920s and 1930s, the Congress Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) touted that modernist architectural design could improve living conditions across the globe. These prefabricated housing units were seen as a success in solving the urgent housing crisis in Europe following World War II. After the Vietnam War, the German Democratic Republic gave as gifts to Vietnam numerous housing developments to solve its sudden housing shortage. However, the apartment units were designed using the European housing model; small, nuclear families, access to public facilities, and less harsh climate suited to concrete building materials. The influence of local customs soon took over the new buildings and families began to adapt the living space to suit their own needs. The need for additional space for family members caused residents to build illegal and very unsafe unit extensions onto balconies. The already small units were further stressed by the need for storage space for bicycles and motorbikes. To compound the problem, the building materials selected for the buildings did not fit the climate of Vietnam with its excruciatingly hot summers and terrific typhoons in autumn. The public space provided at the foot of the buildings did little for the people, causing them to convert ground units into ad hoc shops, markets, restaurants and meeting places (Shannon, 2001). The Quang Trung housing estate clearly shows how single-minded design fails in a situation where communal interests are at play.

Located in a historic district near downtown Oakland, Lafayette Square was at one point a convalescence point for homeless, transients, and drug dealers. Analyzing the historic patterns of the park as well as the patterns of the current users, Hood was able to develop a mosaic that wove the park's historical uses as well as the interests of the community into a flexible space which speaks to all groups, including the homeless. Designed into the park were features such as a small, turfed hillock, game tables and chairs, and a 24-hour public restroom. The power of this design is that "instead of addressing [the community's] different needs by creating a homogenous setting, it accepts their diversity by offering a complex array of features woven together in time and place" (Bressi, 2001, p.13). The parks popularity can be seen by the activities of its users. An impromptu barbershop was set up on occasion in the restroom and regulars to the park fill up their water bottles using the tap outside the restroom and play chess on the provided tables. This is the true measure of success for urban public spaces.

What is being argued for in this paper is a shift in the way theorists and practitioners think about urban public space. Designers are rarely in the position of living in or making regular use of the communities or spaces they create. Therefore, landscape architects, architects, urban planners, and designers, must go further than ever before to design spaces that truly serve the interests of the community. Urban spaces must be thought of as hybrid places, where different values mingle with one another forcing unpredictable events to occur. The ideas of improvisational design and en-formality can guide designers towards spaces that live and breathe as part of the community, rather than exist as static and forlorn components of the city. Thomas Angotti writes:

> Neighborhoods are both myth and reality. As reality they are objective phenomena that arise from metropolitan growth within particular economic and historical contexts… However, there is also a subjective aspect of neighborhood development. Every neighborhood is to a greater or lesser degree, a myth that evolves in the collective consciousness of its people. Planners may serve that myth or they may seek to manipulate it, but they cannot avoid it. (Angotti, 1993, p.207).

It is the myth that defines the subjective nature or culture of a community, and urban public space design must step up and answer to that myth. No longer can they ignore it to serve single issue driven interests. This is how communities can take back their parks and how designers can make it happen.

References

Angotti, T. (1993). *Metropolis 2000; Planning, poverty, and politics*. New York: Routledge Press, 204-209.

Bennet, P. (2000, May). Hybridizing: Walter Hood makes his mark at the Yerba Buena Gardens. *Landscape Architecture,* 18.

Bressi, T. W., & Salvadori, I. (2001). Lafayette Square. *Places,* 10-13.

Hood, W. (1997). *Urban diaries.* Washington DC: Spacemaker Press.

Jencks, C. (1993). *Heteropolis: Los Angeles, the riots and the strange beauty of hetero-architecture.* London: Academy Editions Ltd.

Kasinitz, P. (1995). *Metropolis: Center and symbol of our times.* New York: University Press.

Mann, W. A. (1993). *Landscape architecture: An illustrated history in timelines, site plans, and bibliography.* New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Mozingo, L. (1994, February). The homeless in urban parks: Is exclusion the solution? *Landscape Architecture,* 112.

Mozingo, L. (1995, February). Public space in the balance. *Landscape Architecture,* 42-47.

Owens, P. E. (1994, October). Hang-outs, look-outs, and wipe-outs. *Landscape Architecture*, 84.

Owens-Viani, L. (2002, April). Building on 'street energy': Landscape architect Walter Hood challenges conventional ideas about street, parks, and people. *Landscape Architecture*, 92-94.

Pastier, J. (1994, May). New open space in L.A. *Landscape Architecture*, 42-43.

Shannon, K. (2001). *Vietnam's hybrid urban landscapes: The dream of western architects/ urbanists?* Coping with Informality and Illegality in Human Settlements in Developing Cities; ESF/N-AERUS Annual Workshop, Brussels, Belgium.

Walzer, M. (1995). Pleasures and costs of urbanity. In P. Kasinitz (Ed.), *Metropolis: Center and symbol of our times.* New York: New York University Press, 320-330.

APPENDIX F
EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

by Jon Loxley

Celebrating nature in the middle of the city through education and active involvement are two ways in which the design team of the RiverLink study would like to encourage public participation in the planning, development, and stewardship of community open spaces.

The educational value of having the community involved in the stewardship of Long Beach open space is a commitment of the Long Beach Department of Parks, Recreation and Marine. The department's programs are designed to enhance the understanding of the local environment.

Adopt-A-Wetland

The Adopt-a-Wetland program is similar to the Adopt-a-Beach program. A wetland, however, is an extremely delicate ecosystem, where the relationship between plants and animals are extremely fragile and must be protected. For this reason, volunteers are asked to participate in a one time training program that will prepare them for the sensitive area before they are given assignments.

Dedicate-A-Tree

Long Beach Parks, Recreation, and Marine offers a unique and thoughtful way to recognize individuals and/or special occasions by having a tree planted in a city park.

Adopt-A-Park Program

The Adopt-a-Park program allows individuals or groups to adopt a park in the City of Long Beach. Through such adoption, responsibility is assumed for one year of litter removal, beautification, major or minor improvements, or any combination of the above.

The RiverLink study supports the department's current efforts and includes the following examples of environmental education activities as specific ways the youth of the westside of Long Beach can be active and engaged in their open spaces.

Heritage Trees: Growing a Greener Long Beach

The urban forest applications proposed by the RiverLink study will be in need of a source of tree stock. The youth of Long Beach could develop nursery space within the schoolyards to propagate street tree seedlings. The recommendation of the design team is to collect seed form local heritage trees for the stock. This encourages the use of trees from local sources and teaches youth the importance of a healthy urban forest.

Living with Wildlife in the Urban Setting: Analyzing Urban Habitats

(Adapted from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, 2003)

Purpose

In this activity students will survey, compare, and evaluate different urban sites as habitats for people, plants, and wildlife. They learn that human and wildlife habitats must fill certain similar needs. This study leads the students to a clearer understanding and expression of their feelings about plants and animals in the urban context.

Learning Objectives

After completing this activity, students will be able to:

- Identify two ways in which urbanization harms habitats